



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
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News Release

SISTER PING SENTENCED TO 35 YEARS IN PRISON FOR ALIEN SMUGGLING, HOSTAGE TAKING, MONEY LAUNDERING AND RANSOM PROCEEDS CONSPIRACY

MICHAEL J. GARCIA, United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced today that CHENG CHUI PING, a/k/a “Sister Ping,” was sentenced today to 35 years in prison for her role in leading an international alien smuggling ring. Sister Ping is one of the first, and ultimately most successful, alien smugglers of all time. CHENG was convicted in June 2005 after trial before United States Chief District Judge MICHAEL B. MUKASEY and a jury, of three separate counts, including one count of conspiring to commit alien smuggling, hostage taking, money laundering and trafficking in ransom proceeds, one count of money laundering and one count of trafficking in ransom proceeds. (A count-by-count breakdown of the sentences imposed is attached.)

The evidence at trial demonstrated that Sister Ping ascended from running a one-woman smuggling shop to become the leader of a multi-national smuggling empire. Sister Ping began her career in the early 1980's, smuggling handfuls of fellow villagers from China into the United States by airplane with fake identification documents. By the time of her April 2000 arrest, Sister Ping had reached the pinnacle of her criminal trade and had smuggled more than one thousand aliens into the United States, sometimes hundreds at a time. She had graduated from using a few seats on a commercial airplane to using cargo ships where her “customers” were effectively imprisoned below deck for months at a time with little food and sometimes only two sips of water per day.

According to the trial evidence, Sister Ping hired scores of people in several different countries to move her human cargo for her, hold them hostage until their smuggling fees were paid, and collect those fees from them. Sometimes her “customers” were lucky and arrived safely in the United States where they promptly paid the exorbitant fees Sister Ping charged and were released. Sometimes, however, these “customers” were not so fortunate. As the trial evidence demonstrated, on at least one occasion, one of the rickety boats Sister Ping used to smuggle her “customers” capsized while offloading a larger vessel and fourteen of her “customers” drowned. Others of her “customers” had the

misfortune to be aboard the Golden Venture, a smuggling ship Sister Ping also helped finance for several other alien smugglers. The Golden Venture was intentionally grounded off the coast of Rockaway, Queens in early June 1993 when the offloading vessel failed to meet it in the open sea. The aliens on the Golden Venture, many of whom could not swim, were forced into the frigid spring Atlantic waters and expected to make their own way to shore. Ten of these aliens drowned.

To ensure her “customers” paid their smuggling fees, Sister Ping hired armed thugs from the Fuk Ching, Chinatown’s most vicious and feared gang, to transport and guard her “customers” in the United States. The presence of these gang members guaranteed that Sister Ping got paid the \$25,000 to \$45,000 she demanded for the trip.

Sister Ping did more than run her own empire; the trial evidence showed that she was an important part of a number of other smuggling operations. In addition to helping finance large cargo vessels to smuggle hundreds of aliens for a plethora of different alien smugglers, Sister Ping also ran a money transmitting business out of her Chinatown variety store. She used this business to collect smuggling fees from family members of her own “customers,” and also collected ransom money on behalf of other alien smugglers.

Mr. GARCIA stated: “Sister Ping exploited illegal aliens desperate for a better life in this country. She profited while they suffered. The sentence imposed today is just punishment for that crime.”

MARTIN D. FICKE, Special Agent-in-Charge of New York, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, stated: “Even after conviction, Sister Ping failed to accept responsibility for her extensive human smuggling operations and instead portrayed herself as a victim. The real victims were the ones whose dreams and aspirations were exploited for financial gain and ended in a watery death. Today’s sentence affirms that human smugglers will receive the harshest penalties available under the law.”

MARK MERSHON, Assistant Director in Charge of the New York Office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, stated: “The sentence imposed on Sister Ping reflects the seriousness of the crimes for which she was convicted. She amassed great wealth by exploiting the yearnings of her often impoverished countrymen to come to America. People of limited means paid exorbitant sums for passage to this country under deplorable conditions. Some of those people lost their lives in the process. When her crimes were exposed, she fled the U.S. with as much determination as her victims had shown in getting here. Only a truly international law enforcement effort secured Sister Ping’s capture and return to face justice.”

Mr. GARCIA thanked the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement for their tireless dedication to the investigation and prosecution of Sister Ping. Their efforts and coordination were critical to Sister Ping’s conviction.

Assistant United States Attorneys LESLIE C. BROWN and CHRISTINE Y. WONG are in charge of the prosecution.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.